

THE HISTORY OF *ACROLEPIOPIS MARCIDELLA*
(CURTIS, 1850) (LEP.: ACROLEPIINAE)
IN BRITAIN

By S. C. S. BROWN*

Concerning this species Meyrick says: "Surrey to Dorset, about six examples, all hibernated, not known elsewhere, 10 - 5." Curtis described it in 1850, and added: "A pair of this moth was given to me by Mr. Robertson I think: the specimens have a worn or faded appearance." Who was this Mr. Robertson, and where did he take them? In 1837 Curtis had named a species of *Anarsia* after him: *robertsonella*. This was subsequently shown to be a synonym of *spartiella* (Schrank 1802). His name is not included in the lists of entomologists which appeared from time to time in the *Entomologist's Annual* between the years 1855 to 1874. He most probably lived in North London, for he was known to have collected on Wanstead Flats and in Hainault Forest. In 1861 Stainton writes: "Mr. Bond has a specimen, and I understand Mr. Mitford has recently taken the insect." Bond was of course the well-known Lepidopterist of that time, and resided in St. John's Wood. On his death in 1889 his collection was purchased by Sydney Webb. Robert Mitford lived in Hampstead. His collection was sold at Stevens in 1887.

In 1871 the Rev. F. O. Morris writes: "Localities for this species are at St. John's Wood. The perfect insect appears in September." Why does the author say "Localities"? Bond possessed one specimen, and it is highly improbable that he took it in a London suburb. Morris does not give a description of the insect, and his slightly enlarged coloured figure is crude.

On June 23rd 1886, the Rev. C. R. Digby beat out of an old hawthorn hedge at Studland, Dorset, one worn specimen. This was examined by H. T. Stainton. On July 3rd 1891, he took another, a very worn one, close to the same spot. He said that nearby was a thatched shed. A still further example was taken there on June 15th 1892. Recently I asked the Rev. David Agassiz if he would look at the British Collection in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) and see if any *marcidella* were there. He kindly did so, and wrote to say that there are two specimens, one bears the data: "Studland, 3.7.91." and the other: "Studland, Redrock 7 p.m. 15.VI.92, C. R. Digby."

Mr. Chalmers-Hunt has informed me (*in litt.*) that he has in his possession the MS. Diary of the Rev. C. R. Digby. On page 32 under June 15th. 1892 is the following entry: "When mothing at early dusk by the bathing sheds below the Manor House I took my third *Acrolepia marcidella* as it flew from grass to grass; it was a good spec. and I took it within 30 yards of where I took the other two." Studland Manor, now a hotel, is situated about

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500 yards from the shore, from which it is separated by some cultivated land. The Rev. C. R. Digby was the vicar of Studland between 1878 and 1892. He was a close friend of E. R. Bankes.

A note by E. R. Bankes concerning the capture of the first specimen in Dorset, together with a beautiful coloured figure by Mrs. H. M. Richardson, appeared in the Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Field Club for 1889.

I wrote to Dr. A. Neboiss of the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, to enquire if there are any *marcidella* still in the Curtis collection. His reply (*in litt.*), was that there are two specimens present, both females, and without data. In 1968 they were examined by Dr. Reinhard Gaedike. He designated one as the lectotype, and has labelled it No. 794. He states that *Roesterstammia fumociliella* described by Mann in 1855 is a synonym of *marcidella*. As there are no *fumociliella* in the Mann collection in Vienna, he says that it must be ascertained by description as regards the species identified as *Roesterstammia fumociliella*. Stainton (1869) says that Mann took it at Leghorn in Italy in May 1846, and a pair at Ajaccio in Corsica. Mr. Chalmers-Hunt has pointed out to me (*in litt.*) that this species has been recorded from widely scattered localities in Southern Europe. It appears to be rare.

The relevant entry in the Curtis notebook reads: "X2 *marcidella* Curt. Ann. & M.N.H. 5. 120 desc. "Hainault forest I believe, Robertson." "in June, 53. Whitethorn fence, Wallace's enclosure 1½ miles from Lynd'h to Brock. F. Bond." Following on this information, I wrote to Mr. Don. Small, The Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest, and enquired if he could give me any information as regards to the location of "Wallace's enclosure". His reply was, (*in litt.*), that by 1853 a small enclosure known as Willis's Plantation of oak had been planted on the south eastern side of the road to Bolderford Bridge; M. R. 284033. It would appear therefore, that this is the location mentioned by Curtis, as the distance between Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst as given by him is correct.

As previously mentioned, Meyrick states that about six examples of *marcidella* are known in Britain. This sums up to two in the Curtis collection from Essex, three from Dorset, and one from the New Forest, Hants. The whereabouts of the specimen said to have been taken by Mitford appears to be unknown.

I have been unable to trace the reference to Surrey as given by Meyrick. In the *Victoria County History for Surrey*, Vol. 1., there is a list of insects edited by Herbert Goss, but *marcidella* is not included. The *Victoria County History for Dorset*, Vol. 1., which was to include the insects, was never published.

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COCOON-SPINNING BY CALOPTILIA (LEP.: GRACILLARIIDAE). –

This genus makes a slight trough on the surface of a leaf by means of contracting silk and spins its cocoon therein. It is shaped like the letter "D" with the straight component outermost. The texture of the silk is unusual, taking the form of a shining, papery, pale yellow-green membrane which is slightly transparent, allowing one to see when the transformation within takes place and later the general colour of the pupa, though obscuring detail.

I have been observing the habits of the Gracillariidae for Volume 2 of MBGBI and on the 1st of August I watched a larva of *Caloptilia rufipennella* (Haworth) as it spun its cocoon. When the process seemed to have been completed, it rubbed the flat surface vigorously with its anus, exerting sufficient pressure to cause the anal segment to look greener and darker than the rest of its body. I could not see whether any excretion was being applied to the silk.

Three days later we were staying with a former President of the Linnaean Society and our hostess served nuts with the sherry in a bowl of Roman glass, dating from the 1st century A.D. As I admired it, two thoughts passed through my mind: the first was St. Paul's "For now we see through a glass darkly" and the second was of my *Caloptilia* cocoons, since the glass and the silk shared just the same measure of shine and translucence.

I wonder if any readers have observed similar behaviour in other members of the genus. It is possible that this is a necessary process to give the silk its specialised texture. On the other hand, the irreverent may say that the larva was expressing vulgar disapproval at my intrusion into its private affairs. – A. M. EMMET, Labrey Cottage, Victoria Gardens, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB11 3AF. 9.viii.1981.